

Are we ever witnessing a reality or a construct of an identity in this day and age?

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Summary of topic

“I wish I could treat every day as Halloween, and get dressed up and go out into the world as some eccentric character” (MoMA, 2022). this quote from Cindy Sherman honestly made me think a lot with the way you look at life I always thought we use façades to hide but proven in my research its quite the opposite where I have learnt a range of ideology’s people have towards it, from an identity change to simply a crazy outfit change where one day you dress bright and colourful to the next full black. So, my question is are we ever witnessing a reality or a construct of an identity in this day and age.

Introduction

During this thesis I want to figure out if I was correct in my own thinking in which I came to university and stopped caring what I wear and do, instead of thinking what would that person think or even in the past I had changed my entire self just to fit in with my friends or at least I thought they were. Coming to university really changed me as I felt more comfortable coming out to my friends and family about being a pansexual and I was able to slowly change back into the person I thought I was meant to be, but the issue I am now facing is what happens if I believe I want to do this, but I could still not be my true self anymore, still pretending. The research I have gathered from books to artist versions of identity and even videos and articles.

Chapter 1: Construct of charters

I feel as I used a quote from Cindy Sherman at the start we should investigate her identity, during the makings of Sindy work she has created different sets with props and identities with the use of stereotypical idea people have towards certain people. She always has poor placement of wigs, none blended makeup even the prosthetics are peeling away (MoMA, 2022).

Robert Longo, he explains that while living together for 7 years they use to help her take the imagery and then she would model for his drawings, they first started at the flat before they decided to use their van to go to locations where she would change in the back of the van before the outdoor shoots and each time stepping out, she was a different character. He also commented on the fact people would always call her a photographer, but he said she was always an artist before a photographer, he even pushed this statement by explaining how you can even look at the outfits and makeup she created and be able to see the artist she is, he even said she forms the makeup and stills as a painter not a photographer (MoMA, 2016). I would say she is an artist from the way she has managed to change her entire appearance with the makeup, wigs and outfits as in most of her stills I am not even able to tell that it is her from one to the next, I honestly feel she created the perfect characters for her stills.



Fig. 1: *Untitled Film still #10*



Fig. 2: *Untitled Film still #12*

Cindy in these works was using the stereotype of a house wife, as seen in the second image which is titled the unhappy house wife she has a face of a scared and upset woman as this identity she has created, then taken a look at the first image of her she is using a different identity of a woman that has had enough looking at the expression on her face I would say that she is ready to leave or maybe even stop taking the life she has and wants to fight back against what her life has now become. This helps with the ideology I am looking at because she is using a façade of an identity just to create work like how Amelia Ulman created an entire persona online just as a project she was working on.

Amalia Ulman, after a breakup she moved to the city where she took drugs, changed the way she looked through the use of plastic surgery, she then self-destructed before she started her journey of apology and along the way found her new boyfriend. At the time of her revelling the whole time that the profile was a documentation of her work, not just someone showing her life through social media she gained 88,906 followers (BBC, 2022).

When you now visit her Instagram page, she has gained 138,000 followers, this was all through the use of an identity that was not hers which shows you cannot trust the people you

see online but anyone is possible to gain a following through a façade and the correct use of hashtags.



Fig. 3: *pretty please*



fig. 4: *caaaaaaaant wait to hav abs*

As you can see in these images of Amalia she was posting as a mainstream influencer where in the first one she is even promoting a brand just to fit into the identity she created for the project, I feel this is a strong way she has used identity even looking at hers after Cindy Shermans work, I believe both used identity to their gain in their work. Both worked in two completely different ways, even to think one used a fake identity to show the face of struggles while the other, gained a massive following using a façade of reality where she was an influencer who went from being a promoter to an endless spiral of bad things happening. The way in which I feel they are different though is how Cindy created 70 different stills of stereotyping women while Amalia worked on one type of person thorough out the project she has created.

Both photographers work in a reality where they are different people but in a book, I researched for my thesis I learned about a girl who was not able to see herself in an image that was taken of her with others, she sat there analysing the image until she realised she was the person who did not look the same as the others. She had never been photographed before

and did not understand why she then looked so different from the others. The child had always been around these people as her grand mother was hired by the family, when she realised who she was in the image she said “aw, aw! Ah’m the coloured”. As she was raised around all white people, she had never noticed the difference in skin colour (Henninger, 2007, p. 3). Imagine the shock she experienced not being able to tell who she is but in are lives we are photographed and told from a baby how you look by others and yourself. These photographers can even create a different person and still know their identity, but the girl only realised hers through the image that was taken.

Chapter 2: Façade of reality

Allegory of the cave, is a book written by Plato's it talks about a group of people chained up in a cave never seeing the outside world and only ever seeing the shadows projected by the fire as seen in the diagram below, I believe this is a passed version of some peoples reality now in which they see things on social media like the perfect body or life people are living but how can you always tell as people can edit or distort a reality or identity in which you now see. Maybe one day we will be like the one man in the cave who was able to escape the cave and see the real world but what happens if people already have and are scared to show everyone else for the same reason as the man in the cave as he was killed when he tried to even change the others idea of life, as they thought he had gone insane. (Plato, 2017, p. all)



Fig. 5, *plato's cave*

Is our reality and identity just a construct to change over time or even just to better are lives, in the book black burn it talks about different philosophers talk about how they feel that

reality we see through our eyes is not the truth and that we see everything through a distorted lens. (Blackburn, 2018) in fact I believe this more than ever, even if you were not to think of it the way they were in the past think of our lives now where everything is faked from the way people look on magazines after photoshop to social media like I spoke about in chapter one with Amalia. The thing is are we better off with seeing a fake version of reality like the philosophers say we are seeing because if we see the world the true way would everything change in a better way or even worse than we now see everything. The filters we see now we may feel like sometimes are a block in our society as people feel hurt as they do not look the way they see online or even physical form, would everything go wrong without them or better off as I feel like seeing people portrayed as the beauty standard is wrong so using facades get more people looking but never know what truth is and seeing things in a different light may hurt or worse make people feel depressed.

Catfishing, it's fine when we think of a creation of a person for a work in art and acting and even other ways, but the issue is catfishing is a major problem online too from tricking people into sending you money or even perhaps hurting someone here are some statistics I have found.

64% of catfishes are women. 24% pretend to be the opposite gender when creating their fake identity. 73% use photos of someone else, rather than real pictures of themselves. 25% claim a phony occupation when presenting themselves online to a business. 54% of people who engage in online dating feel that the information in potential mate's profiles is false. 28% of people have been harassed or made to feel uncomfortable by catfishes. 53% of Americans admit to falsifying their online profiles. At least 10% of all online dating profiles are scammers. 51% of people who engage in online dating are

already in a relationship. Women lie more about age than men. Men lie about finances more often than women. 40% of men lie about position and salary. 83 million Facebook accounts are assumed fake. (Wright, 2018)

Even just to witness some of these percentages are very scary to think about how many people online are not truthful and are not being truthful of who they are sometimes even using images of others to portray a façade of them being this person but the reality of it all is a lie.

Facade of suffering, looking into a study I found a doctor run a study on the minds of mental ill patients where he gave them a project to go take imagery of anything they wanted and to then come back to the them with an exploration of the work they created, they then spoke about the façade of which community and society had put upon them, the doctor then analysed the way they spoke about the work and how they felt towards the feelings they have portrayed. (sitvast, 2010)



Fig. 6, Multiple versions

I feel like this is a great way to see how people feel in our society as he spoke to the people who have been traumatized by the way are world is, I feel like from a personal place each person depending on how they been treated, from the way they look can change their entire life for example I struggle with my mental health myself and even in my imagery I try to portray the way I am feeling when I can, like in the past I created imagery that shown off different variations of myself by multiplying myself in different clothing this was before I felt like my true self as I was always bullied as a kid to a teenager. I feel the cause of my current issues with mental health are still issues that have stuck around from my past, sometimes someone can say something to me as a joke and I will get hurt thinking what happens if they truly meant this to me, this is my whole reasoning behind me starting this topic as my thesis as this is something close to my heart.

Chapter 3: Alter Ego

Alter ego, Marcel Duchamp was living in Paris when Man Ray moved there and he greeted by marcel, he then introduced Man Ray to his fellow members of the dada community from writers to artist. They had both previously worked together while in New York this is where the creation of the alter ego came from named Rrose Sélavy. She first appeared in 1920 but her name did not have the second r till a year later in 1921, the name is also a representation of the French pun “Eros, c’est la vie (sex that’s life) Hawkins (2015). My reasoning for bringing up Rrose is even in 1920 artists relied on a façade of reality to show off work as marcel created Rrose an either alter ego just for his work.



Fig. 7. *Rrose Sélavy*



Fig. 8. Portrait of *Rrose Sélavy*

Duchamp (Rrose), the alter ego was a great way to get a bigger following in the art industry because not as many people used this for there work there for being a lot more popular in his/her time depending on if you speak about the alter ego or the artist. I believe this creation by Man Ray and Duchamp lead his work brilliantly, as this was one of the first pieces I knew of his creations.

Claude Cahun, lived mostly on the Jersey islands with their love Marcel Moore they both adopted their preferred gender-neutral names Lucy Schwob and Suzanne Malherbe in their early adult hood. A lot of Cahuns work was sadly destroyed after they were imprisoned but the Nazis for resisting against them, the artists explored their self from circus performance to stripped down Buddhist (Art story, 2022) their work was in my words a exploration of different cultures and being.



Fig, 9. *I am in training, don't kiss me*



fig, 10. *Untitled*

Gender-neutral, I believe looking at Cahuns work shows different identities but seem to always fit a gender that does not fit male or female but genderfluid, from the untitled image I was not sure if the image was of Cahun or of a different person I feel they seem a lot more mescaline in this image over the one titled I am in training, don't kiss me, I feel they used there gender identity as a tool to make their work from neutral to feminine or even mescaline.

Looking at both Cahun and Duchamp's work you seen different identities to their own is that because their created to help with creation of work or maybe even their selves, the more I see

the more my mind set changes on the way I believe identity to be. Duchamps and man rays creation of Rrose shown his self-depicted as a woman while Cahun explored a number of different pathways with gender not sticking to the old social construct of two but the more modern of more people identifying as gender neutral, gender fluid or even nonbinary, this has become the normative of are time but during both creations even Duchamp dressed as an alter ego of a woman was not okay let alone for someone (Cahun) to be using a gender neutral name and to stickling to the gender construct pushed on us from a child.

Examples, since I was little all I can remember is different views of gender being pushed on me from colours being for certain genders or clothing, I even remember being stopped by one of my grand parents from being able to pierce my one lobe because they said I it was for girls not boys, that was at age six I did not get my first piercing till twelve. You maybe asking what tis has to do with my thesis but before you even have a chance to explore and figure out who you are and what you identity is, you have people pushing their own opinions on you like even though I was stopped I knew it was a part of me and still got it six years later now at age twenty one I have eleven different piercings from multiple on both ears to my tongue and two on my nose.

Another example, clothing all my life has been gendered and a fixed thing from birth till university I was always told that looks like it is for women you cannot wear that as I am a man, but I do not think that is a statement that should be said to kids because then you start to judge people and yourself on it, I now wear and do what I like to my body and I feel more comfortable with it instead of feeling trapped like before when I would only wear blue jeans and a t-shirt and judge others from the mindset I was brought up on. I believe I became and found my identity though going to university but not there itself but the people I met while there helped my grow and become me.

Chapter 4: social media affects

“The devil has many faces”, now taking a look into the difference of usage of social media a study took place where some of the participants had no restriction and could use social media as much as they liked, while the rest were told to use social media for thirty minutes a day after only three weeks there were signs that shown how much it puts a toll on you where people felt less depressed and lonely. Experts even suggested this was because while on social media you start to compare people to yourself from the way they are living their lives in their perfect images online. (Zouareg, 2022)

I think that so many people fake there own lives on social media because they see someone who fits the beauty standard that has been set by are society and will change the way they look through either editing of images or in extreme circumstances there selves in the real world, even people posting about being in different countries or lying to others just to make their life look as good as others they see online. Maybe if social media did not exist or only let you use it in life, we would not try to change just to fit a standard that does not need to exist.

Identity affects by beauty standards, all genders have found themselves in loss of their identity after witnessing the beauty standard they see on social media, it has even brought up more issues including serious mental health issues and even in some cases body dysmorphia through the struggle of trying to fit the body standard that is not attainable. The article states “the first thing most of us do when we wake up in the morning is to instinctively reach for our phones’ from the very first moment, we wake we place ourselves in this alternate reality. (Obiora, 2022)

As someone who was brought up as devices like mobile phones, game consoles and phones improved, I can even remember when I would wake up and grab my iPod touch at the time because every morning I used to watch something on it before school now I do the same but check social media and even Tik Tok, as someone who is aged 21 years of age I would not want to know the toll in which kids go through as even I who didn't really use social media till I was in year 7 of school you now see kids who are in primary school with iPhone's and even kids who are younger with iPad's and tablets.

The issue I see is from a very young age people now see the standard of beauty through social media or even through Tik Tok, there you see people from all over the world but not in a good way from what I have seen is people who don't look a certain way get bullied and even worse found in person and either attacked or bullied in their own homes, I have even witnessed a live stream where someone had the police called on them while live on Tik Tok as a joke but that's another issue where people now see bullying as a joke when they do not know them in the real world.

“Younger users of Tik Tok, In 2021, The Wall Street Journal conducted its own investigation into the app. The journal created 100 “bot” accounts, giving them each different ages, genders, locations, and interests. The bots were programmed to linger on videos that related to their programmed interests. These interests were never entered into the app. One bot was given an interest in sadness and depression-related videos. Within 36 minutes of creating this bot account, the TikTok algorithm learned that the user was interested in depression-related content. Eventually, about 93% of the content on the bot “for you” page was about sadness and depression.” (Alfred, 2022)

As someone who struggles with mental health issues I can say while watching my for you page that is on Tik Tok I will see 1 in 10 videos will talk about mental health even just talk about suicide or jokes about it sometimes, this does not help me at all with some of the problems I face so I even had to start saying I was not interested in these types of videos now as they appear on my for you page. The thoughts I have from this is an issue though a kid who might never of had these issues or even thought about them till seeing them and slowly that can develop a mindset of it being a joke decide to kill themselves as they have been told it is just a joke so many times, they could take their own life. I even think my mental health became worse from the videos shown to me on my for you page and other social media pages.

Both reports of the algorithm giving you things you like or interact with have so many issues but the main thing is we need to maybe have a way to make sure younger people do not have a standard of beauty put on them or be shown stuff of mental health problems, it is bad enough for someone like me to see it let alone causing people who do not have mental health issues to slowly get them from the videos they are being shown.

Conclusion

Different variables, change my idea of the answer to my question I even believe there may not be a true answer to the question I have set myself in this thesis from artists using a different identity for their work to someone changing it from what they see online. First thing to remember is each artist from Cindy Sherman to my last artist Claude Cahun, have used another identity in their work like how Cindy may not look like herself from the wigs and makeup used in her work but under all that is her real self but how can she know her identity when she is always changing herself for her work. Even to think of the project made by Amalia Ulman where her entire life changed. Using a Facebook and Instagram Amalia managed to gain a great size following from the start to the end slowly showing an entire face persona (façade) just to show how easy it is to fake your own life, but how does she now live back as she once did when she spent so long in a façade of herself.

This leads me on to where I researched catfishing and the realisation of social media, where there were so many proven statistics of faked identity's from lying about marriage to age or even their entire identity even worse 73% of people use images of others instead of themselves. Then I even took a look into the affects of social media including Tick Tok, where it has been proven to show you what things you interact with because of the algorithm, the issue with this is young kids and teenagers will start to be shown videos about suicide and eating disorders and other mental health issues this causes a filter in your brain making you think that it is okay because if you were to starve yourself you would get the body you want after seeing the beauty standard which is across all social medias.

Fake lives and people, All people now see is influencers, famous people and even friends faking their true identity and lives through photoshop, body modifications like plastic surgery to look like the standard of beauty, this then leaves others who do not look this way feeling anxious and depressed because they believe they need to be this way which in my own way I learnt the hard way from hurting myself from being bullied in school for the way I looked and even then coming home and watching tv where characters who looked like me get bullied and then the people who fit the standard are praised or are even the ones who are the bullies.

Allegory of the cave, if you think of Plato's idea as social media we are all prisoners of it from checking it each day to posting what you are doing just so others see, like what happens when you see someone doing something you have always wanted to do but you cannot because of it being too expensive or even faked in some cases, think how what you post maybe affecting someone else.

I believe there is no true answer to my question of are we ever witnessing a reality or a construct of an identity in this day and age, because we cannot answer something that is always changing. If someone 200 years ago asked this question it be the same as now because how can we answer something that then would have had a different standard of beauty then, I believe that we will only ever go more into a construct of identity over what we are as over time there will be more and more things changing the idea like how we will one day all have some sort of virtual reality we visit and pretend to be something we are not so I do believe there is a construct of identity but it is always changing because of new things around us.

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